

Family Get-togethers on Chanukah

Posted by davidt - 10 Dec 2024 15:25

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Many families have get-togethers on Chanukah to thank Hashem for the miracles He performed. What are the *halachos* that we must abide by with regard to upholding the proper standards of *tznius*? In particular, how are these *halachos* to be applied to large families that include brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, cousins, grandchildren, etc.? Do the same standards of maintaining distance between members of the opposite gender apply here as they apply with unrelated people, or are the standards somewhat more relaxed with family members?

Additionally, if a game or the like is played at the get-together, is it a problem if the entire family — men and women — play together?

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Re: Family Get-togethers on Chanukah

Posted by BenHashemBH - 10 Dec 2024 15:41

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[davidt wrote on 10 Dec 2024 15:25:](#)

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Shalom Brother,

I'm not going to pasken anything, and there are a lot of important details that one would discuss with the appropriate Torah authority.

I will say that the halachos tend to be more strict with family members, not less. This is because there is a level of comfort in the familiarity that is likely to influence the boundaries. But I'm not a Rabbi, so definitely get opinions from someone else.

Kol Tov and hatzlacha in figuring out an appropriate and healthy way to celebrate channukah with your mishpacha.

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Re: Family Get-togethers on Chanukah  
Posted by redfaced - 10 Dec 2024 15:58

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**Maintaining Separation:** We will now address the question of how much of a distance one needs to maintain when men and women get together at a family Chanukah party. It is clear that not all cases are alike and not all families are fully comparable. Some families are very large, while some are very small. Some family gatherings are only attended by one or two generations of relatives, while others are attended by several generations, including many people who are related through marriage. When it comes to smaller families, in many cases there is no “obligation” to have a *mechitzah*. It is enough for the men and women to keep themselves sufficiently separated and avoid mingling with each other. However, there are cases where a *mechitzah* is necessary, especially if the family is larger and consists of numerous branches of relatives from several generations who all are gathering together in one place. The *halachos* of how much separation is needed will also be dependent on the type of party that is being arranged, and what the mood and atmosphere will be like, all of which greatly depends on the nature of the family. **Since the practical *halachah* can vary greatly depending on the specific nature of the gathering, one should consult a *Rav* in every instance.** The *halachah* is clear - men and women should remain separate from each other and should not

intermingle. Guidance is necessary to apply it practically in each situation. **A More Detailed Explanation:** It is important to understand that, according to *halachah* (see *Shulchan Aruch EH 21:7; Chut Shani EH 1 and 16; Shiurei Halachah-Rav Felder 11:3*), relatives — **with the exception** of very close relatives (such as a father-mother, grandfather-grandmother, brother-sister and, according to some *poskim* and in certain aspects, also biological aunt-nephew) — are considered the same as strangers. This includes brothers and sisters-in-law, and certainly includes cousins through marriage and further distant relatives. Therefore, when a large family gets together it is exactly the same as if a gathering of strangers of both genders is taking place. Just as *mechitzos* are used at a sheva brochos or any event where there is more than just immediate family, even if most of the attendees are somehow related, the same applies at such a gathering, especially if the mood is lighthearted. It is also obvious and clear that the rules of guarding one's eyes and keeping one's thoughts pure apply to interactions with relatives through marriage and to more distant family members. As with any other women, one must do whatever is necessary to avoid the danger of transgressing these prohibitions. As the **Sefer Hachassidim**(393) writes: "If a mitzvah leads to an *aveirah*, it is better not to do the mitzvah. An example of this is the mitzvah to bring joy to a groom and bride. If one knows that there will be immodestly dressed people at the wedding, or that he will not be able to avoid thinking improper thoughts, or that he will inevitably gaze at the women there, he should not go." Some people think to themselves, "We didn't do this until now. I never saw my parents do this. If it was good enough for them then it's good enough for me. Why should I institute such a change?" To counter this thought process, it is important to explain several points:

1. It is possible that the reason these standards were not abided by in the past was simply due to a lack of knowledge. We find that many early *sefarim* already discussed this type of lack of awareness (such as those cited in the Introduction), and they say that ignorance of the *halachos* often leads people to believe that forbidden actions are permitted.
2. Very often, families grow gradually. Over time, the family grows but no one realizes that the new reality of the situation necessitates an equal change to their standards. There is no official point in time when a family's status changes from "small" to "big," and it is hard to pinpoint the exact time to institute a change to the required boundaries to reflect the new "facts on the ground". Therefore, the family members continue to interact the same way they have always done, without creating any boundaries, and never put a stop to it.
3. We also must keep in mind that previous generations faced much less danger and challenges than our generation does. This is especially true in the matters of *tznius* and the corresponding need to protect oneself from falling prey to impropriety in this area. Our generation must, therefore, adjust previous practices and set necessary boundaries to deal with contemporary challenges. We must ensure that we do not come to transgress the laws of seeing forbidden sights, having improper thoughts, engaging in improper behavior, etc. (See *Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvah 188*)

The need for this is amplified by the testimony of our *Rabbanim* about the many incidents of severe downfalls that they are dealing with as a result of those who were not properly vigilant when amongst family members. Rav Bentzion Snyders *shlita*, Rav of Basel, Switzerland, relates (in his book *V'Ha'ish Moshe – The Torah of Hagaon Hatzaddik Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l of Zurich, Switzerland, p. 208*) that he once asked Rav Moshe Soloveitchik *zt"l* what he should answer to people who ask why it is necessary to be so stringent today and to do things

that their great-grandparents never did in their times, such as putting up a tall *mechitzah* between the men and women by every gathering and *simchah*. Rav Moshe answered that we find in the Gemara (*Bava Basra 91b*) that the *Amora* R' Yochanan described a stark difference between the generation of his youth and the generation he lived in later in his life. He said that certain conduct between men and women in the past did not lead to any sin but, when he got older, he saw that this conduct was creating problems. The same is true in our times. There were certain things that people did not have to be so stringent about in the past because people in general were more formidable, and these things did not cause them to fall prey to sin. Today, however, our spiritual fortitude is much weaker, and we need stronger boundaries to avoid falling to transgression. *We will continue with the answer tomorrow*

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Re: Family Get-togethers on Chanukah  
Posted by davidt - 11 Dec 2024 17:08

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non-biological and more distant relatives have the same halachic status as strangers. Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch's rule that it is forbidden to joke around with an unrelated member of the opposite gender applies to them. Relatives who fall into this category include brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. When one interacts with them, one must remember to act in a refined manner. (*Chut Shani EH 21:2; Shiurei Halachah-Rav Felder 11:3*)

It is true that, in some ways, standards are somewhat more relaxed with family members. For example, if a family is sitting together at a *seudah* or gathering, it is permitted for a man to relate a "good line" to everyone seated in the room, even if there are daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, etc. present. This is permitted because the remark was said for everyone in the room and was not meant to create feelings of closeness to any particular woman or create a lighthearted atmosphere.

Still, one must be careful to maintain an appropriate environment. He must ensure that he is simply saying a good *vort* and not creating an atmosphere of joviality and lightheartedness, which would be forbidden. (*ibid.*)

Therefore, if a gathering will include a program of activities, these should not be the type of activities that create lighthearted interaction between men and women. For example, if a game will be played, much care should be taken to ensure that it is not the type of activity that will create an atmosphere of joking around or excessive jolliness.

If one knows that his family will be organizing the type of activity that may be problematic and he is unable to put a stop to it, he should consult his *Rav* to determine what to do.

It is important to note that even if the women organize their own activities without including the men, they should still make sure to act in a manner that is fully refined. If there are men nearby who can hear what is going on, the women should behave in a manner that is appropriate for a woman in the presence of a man.

We will conclude with the words of the ***Pele Yoetz***(*Erech Ahavas Ish V'ishah*): "A woman must be careful not to joke around or speak excessively or lightheartedly with her husband's relatives, and she certainly shouldn't engage in other actions that can lead to familiarity. Instead, she should be modest and refined in her father-in-law's house in order to ensure that she doesn't cause anyone to sin because those type of *aveiros...*" (He continues with very harsh words about those who are not careful in these matters.)

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